Free Email On The Web

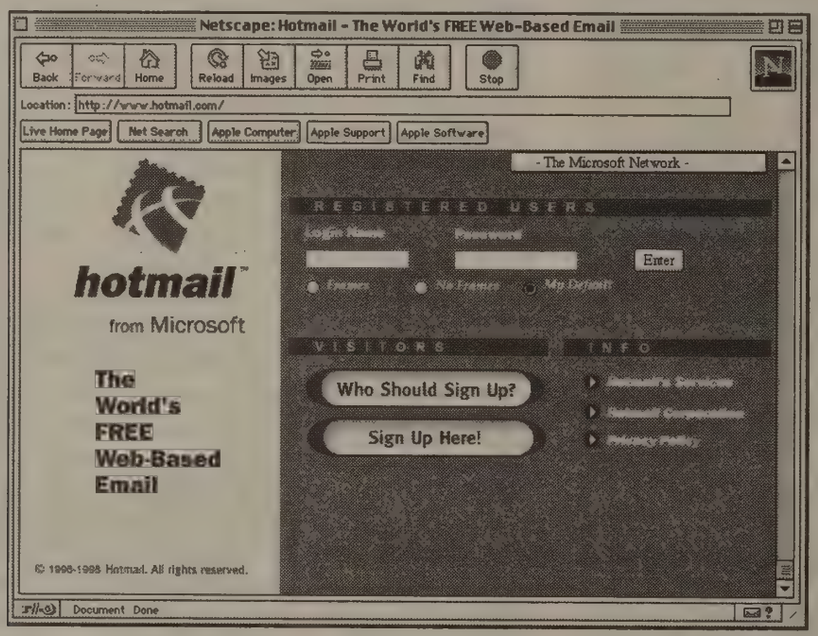
A Bargain At Twice The Price!

By Kevin M. Savetz

The big boys like Yahoo, HotMail, and GeoCities are tried and true, but there's nothing wrong with using any of the smaller services—as long as they're reliable, protect your privacy, and provide the services you need.

Those of us with electronic mail know just what a wonderful tool it can be. The Net is home to numerous free services that can make a good thing even better: by providing you with an elegant email address, multiple mailboxes, increased privacy, and easy access to your mail from any computer on the Internet. For people with access to the Net but no email address, these services can mean the difference between life with mail and life without.

There are many different free email services on the Internet: perhaps a dozen or so "big name" ones such as HotMail, Yahoo Mail, and GeoCities, plus countless smaller services. The big boys are



tried and true, but there's nothing wrong with using any of the smaller services—as long as they're reliable, protect your privacy, and provide the services you need.

Service Types

There are three distinct ways that these services can get your email to you: using a Web interface, with a POP account, or via mail forwarding. Some services offer just one of these delivery options; some offer all three.

With a Web interface, you can read and send email using your trusty Web browser. To use this type of system, all you need is access to a browser: the service provides a Web interface that lets you read and send mail. This is very flexible: you can access your email from anywhere you can log in to the Internet. It doesn't require an email address at your ISP—but if you do have one, remember that your Web-based mail account is totally separate from your ISP mail. This makes Web-based mail useful in a number of situations: you can keep personal email off of the servers at your workplace; you can create multiple accounts for your kids so they stay out of your mail; or you might create a mailbox just for your mailing list subscriptions.

Another type of email account is the POP account. POP, which stands for Post Office Protocol, allows you to receive email using just about any standard email program, such as Eudora or Outlook Express, or even with one of those cool palm-held computers. Like the Web interface option, POP mail doesn't require you to have another email address, but it does mean you have to install an email client on your computer. And like the Web interface option, POP accounts provide a measure of privacy.

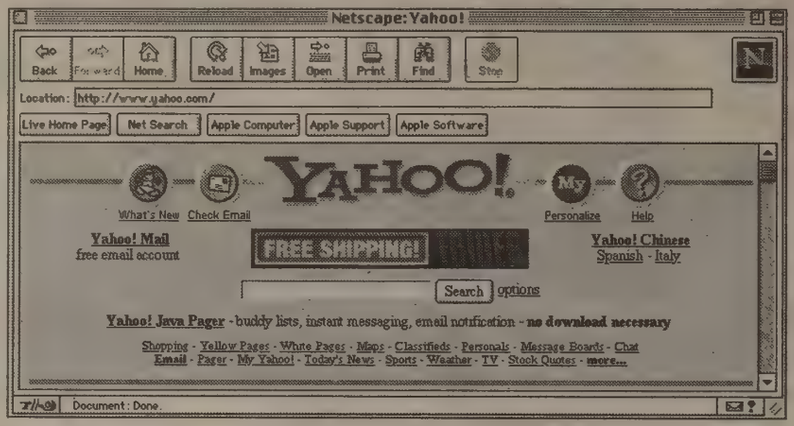
Power users will find that using an email client provides more features than doing email through a Web interface can—but with POP, it's not as simple to check your mail from just anywhere.

The final type of free email account is mail forwarding. Mail forwarding services only work if you already have an email address. Forwarding gives you a new email address that, when you receive a message, punts it to your other address. Why would you want to do this? Because *bob@iname.com* is a whole lot easier to remember (and prettier on your business card) than *74774.2725@compuserve.com* .

Also, mail forwarding provides a modicum of privacy: have your John Tesh fan club mail sent to an address that doesn't reveal your identity to other subscribers.

Mail forwarding services let you receive mail at a special address, but don't necessarily allow you to send it from that address (some services do provide a Web interface for that).

Which type of account is best for you? If you already have email but hate your address, mail forwarding is an easy solution. If you don't have email at all, or want additional mailboxes, go with Web-based mail or a POP account. Web-based mail is simpler and accessible from any Web browser, but POP mail can be sweeter for power users.



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Finding A Service

How do you find a free mail service? Point your web browser to one of these indices.

The Free Email Address Directory (*www.emailaddresses.com*) is a well-organized index of dozens of them, sorted by the type of service: Web-based mail, POP and forwarding. In addition, it lists a myriad of services that work in languages other than English.

Another fantastic index is The Guide to Free Email Accounts (*www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Vista/8015/free.html*). It lists more than 200 services worldwide, and also sorts by the type of service.

For instant gratification, try one of these popular services:

HotMail (*www.hotmail.com*), Yahoo Mail (*http://mail.yahoo.com*) or ZDNET Mail (*www.zdnemail.com*).

You can get more bang for your buck (well, not even a buck—they're free!) with GeoCities, which offers Web page space along with email (*www.geocities.com*); and My DejaNews, which offers a nifty Usenet reader plus Web-based mail (*www.dejanews.com/rg_reg.xp*). ◆

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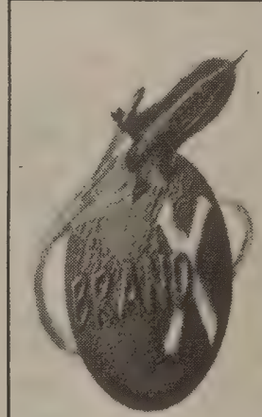

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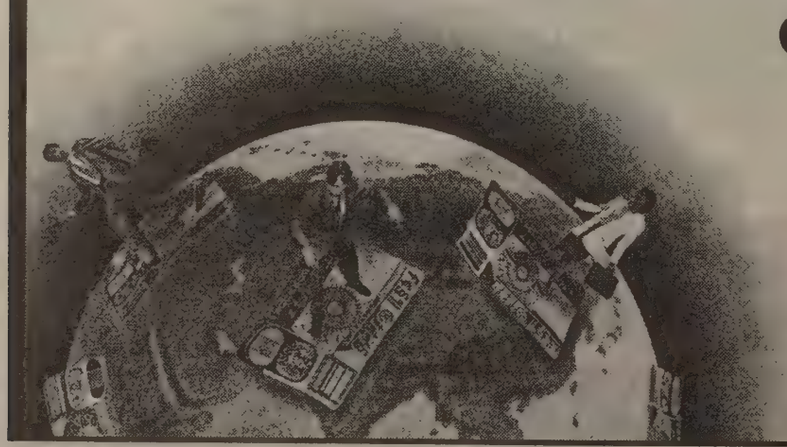

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